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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/29/2017  
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OFDP, DO, XL  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OURISMAN'S INTRODUCTORY VISIT TO  
DOMINICA

REF: 05 BRIDGETOWN 1455

Classified By: Ambassador Mary Ourisman for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Ourisman presented her credentials to the President of Dominica and called on both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister on January 24. In her courtesy calls, the Ambassador and her interlocutors discussed both current and possible future USAID projects, the Advance Passenger Information System, deportees, and other issues. The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister emphasized the need for dialogue between Washington-based officials and their Caribbean Community (CARICOM) counterparts in the region. More frequent visits by high-level U.S. officials to the region would send a strong message that the United States still values its relationship with the Caribbean. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Ambassador Ourisman presented her credentials to Dr. Nicholas J.O. Liverpool, President of the Commonwealth of Dominica, on January 24. Following this presentation, the Ambassador called on Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit and Foreign Minister Charles Savarin, and also held a press conference. The Ambassador was accompanied in each meeting by Deputy Chief of Mission Mary Ellen Gilroy, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Director James Goggin, Public Affairs Officer Julie O'Reagan, and Political Officer Tyler Allen.

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PM SKERRIT: REQUESTS FOR VARIOUS FORMS OF ASSISTANCE  
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¶3. (U) In his courtesy call with Ambassador Ourisman, PM Skerrit was flanked by Minister of State in the Ministry of Tourism Loreen Bannis-Roberts, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Education Petter St. Jean, Minister of State for National Security Rayburn Blackmoore, Press Secretary Sean Douglas, and Cabinet Secretary Felix Gregoire. During the meeting, the Ambassador and PM Skerrit focused on five key issues between the United States and Dominica: the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS), U.S.-CARICOM engagement, foreign assistance, scholarships and training opportunities, and the extradition of Randy Isidore.

¶4. (U) The Prime Minister confirmed that Dominica's Parliament passed legislation related to the Advance Passenger Information System on January 8. While

acknowledging APIS and other forms of U.S. assistance, PM Skerrit expressed a desire for more dialogue between officials in Washington and their counterparts in CARICOM. The Ambassador noted that, under Secretary Rice's initiative, the United States revitalized the U.S.-CARICOM relationship, including through the Trade and Investment Council (TIC). Looking ahead, Ambassador Ourisman also pointed to the June 2007 Caribbean Conference as another example of U.S. commitment to the region.

15. (U) PM Skerrit expressed gratitude for USAID's ongoing Caribbean Open Trade Support (COTS) program in Dominica and recommended that U.S. foreign assistance take the form of small projects that would complement the work of Peace Corps Volunteers. He also requested that USAID return to awarding scholarships, citing his own USAID-sponsored education in the United States as a success story.

16. (SBU) The Ambassador reminded PM Skerrit that in 2005 and 2006 a number of Dominicans opted out of various military training programs, costing U.S. taxpayers approximately USD 60,000. She highlighted the recent case of Attorney General Ian Douglas who chose to participate in a Chinese training program rather than taking part in an International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) which he had previously accepted. His failure to inform the Embassy of this change in time for us to identify a replacement cost American taxpayers USD 10,000.

17. (SBU) In response, PM Skerrit emphasized that his commitment to increase access of Dominicans to training opportunities was so great that he had raised the overseas travel budget for police officers. He stated that he believed the issue of reduced military participation had been

resolved but said he would revisit it. In speaking only about the police and the military, however, the Prime Minister neglected to comment on AG Douglas's lack of participation in an IVLP.

18. (C) When the Ambassador mentioned the need to close the extradition case of Randy Isidore, PM Skerrit stated that the government has sought legal advice regarding this case. He stated multiple times that technical assistance from the United States could help Dominica answer the outstanding legal questions. However, PM Skerrit added that, despite existing evidence against Isidore, he thought re-arresting Isidore could potentially violate the Constitution and relevant laws. (Note: Isidore was arrested in 2001 in response to the USG's extradition request. He was released by AG David Bruney that same year. As reported in reftel, succeeding AG's have taken the stance that, although Isidore should be arrested and extradited, they did not know whether they were empowered to overturn AG Bruney's order releasing Isidore. Given PM Skerrit's comment that a re-arrest of Isidore would be unconstitutional, it appears that Dominica's government has lost its political will to help the United States on this matter. At this point, Dominica only seems interested in using the Isidore case as a vehicle for obtaining additional technical assistance from the United States. End Note.)

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FM SAVARIN: NO TO DEPORTEES YES TO INVESTMENTS AND ENGAGEMENT  
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19. (C) FM Savarin raised the issue of criminal deportees from the United States as a key concern for the region. The Foreign Minister informed the Ambassador that countries in the Caribbean were analyzing the effect criminals deported from the United States have on crime in the region. He confidently predicted that the eventual report from this study would show that a significant number of the deportees were Caribbeans who left the region as children and acquired their criminal skills in the United States. (Note: FM Savarin did not explain exactly who is performing or sponsoring this study. End Note.)

¶10. (SBU) According to FM Savarin, Dominica would welcome more U.S. investment, especially in tourism and agribusiness. The Foreign Minister explained that a number of laboratory results show that Dominica's spring water is of extremely high quality and that this water could compete internationally in the bottled water market. However, past attempts to locate an investor have failed. He also stated that Dominica's energy sector could reduce its dependence on foreign oil by increasing production of hydroelectricity or geothermal electricity. According to FM Savarin, Dominica currently utilizes hydroelectricity for approximately 40 percent of its output, but that Dominica has the potential to derive 80-100 percent of its electricity through hydropower. USAID Director Goggin suggested that the United States Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) could do a feasibility study on Dominica's alternative energy potential. (Note: USAID will follow up with USTDA regarding the study. End Note.)

¶11. (C) According to FM Savarin, during the 30 months since Dominica diplomatically recognized the People's Republic of China, the Prime Minister of Dominica had visited China twice, meeting both the President and Premier, and that both the Vice Premier and Foreign Minister of China had visited Dominica. During that same time, FM Savarin complained, not one Eastern Caribbean Prime Minister had met the President of the United States, nor has President Bush visited the region. The Foreign Minister stated that a meeting with the President would show that Washington is still focused on the Caribbean region. In response, the Ambassador explained that she personally extended invitations to both the President and the First Lady to visit the region. DCM Gilroy also cited the upcoming June Caribbean Conference as providing a good opportunity for Caribbean leaders to meet with Washington officials. In addition, the DCM welcomed Dominica's recent appointment of an ambassador to Washington. When FM Savarin explained that the new envoy had not yet been accredited, the DCM promised that the Embassy would look into the matter.

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COMMENT  
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¶12. (C) The Ambassador enjoyed a warm welcome in each of her meetings in Dominica. Dominica's leaders stressed the historically positive relationship between the United States and Dominica, particularly emphasizing the period of the Reagan administration as the highlight of the relationship. Nevertheless, they also stressed that, even if actual assistance to the Caribbean has doubled under the current Administration, the perception is that the United States has shifted its focus away from the Caribbean.

¶13. (C) This perception has also been fueled by Dominica's high-visibility engagement with China, illustrated not only with visits, but also with assistance. The MFA car provided for the Ambassador's staff was emblazoned with a "gift of the People's Republic of China" sign. Cabinet Secretary Gregoire, who participated in the Ambassador's meeting with PM Skerrit, sported a Dominica-China lapel pin, perhaps to illustrate that Dominica is looking elsewhere for partners. Pictures of the Prime Minister with Fidel Castro and the Foreign Minister with Chinese officials hung prominently on the walls of the government buildings visited by the Ambassador.

¶14. (C) Despite China's active and very visible engagement with Dominica, Dominican leaders continue to claim that they desire stronger U.S.-Caribbean relations. Increased attention through high-level visits to the region and meetings at the June Caribbean Conference could provide the desired spark in the U.S.-Caribbean relationship.

OURISMAN